

"TANF Reauthorization: Helping Hard To Employ Families"

Statement by Senator Craig Thomas

April 25, 2002

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing.

America's "war on poverty" policy, however noble, created a welfare system that encouraged dependence - rather than responsibility and self sufficiency. In 1996, Congress passed a progressive welfare reform law that transformed welfare benefits into temporary help, not a permanent way of life. The new system honors work by requiring all able-bodied recipients to find employment. The goal was to give participants a strong, time-limited support system as they developed life-long skills that encouraged independence.

While encouraged by the initial results of welfare reform, it is vital that we not forget those still on the rolls. Indeed, we must focus on engaging the 60 percent of TANF recipients, according to HHS data, reporting no work activity in an average month. Understandably, the TANF caseload is diverse - that is why Congress has given the states flexibility to craft innovative approaches to respond to the changing face of the welfare system. I am pleased to see we have a number of qualified witnesses here with us

today who know what happens when federal dollars leave
Washington and reach needy families. Thank you.